CLAIMS:

What is claimed is:

1. A method in a computer system, said method comprising the steps of:

   receiving a general requirement;

5   receiving a specified utility for at least one of a plurality of types of items which would satisfy said requirement;

   locating a plurality of available items which match at least one of said plurality of types of items; and

   ranking said located plurality of available items utilizing said utility specified for

10   at least one of said plurality of types of items.

2. The method according to claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

   providing an intelligent software agent;

   receiving, utilizing said intelligent software agent, a general requirement;

   receiving, utilizing said intelligent software agent, a specified utility for each of a

15   plurality of types of items which would satisfy said requirement;

   locating, utilizing said intelligent software agent, a plurality of available items which match one of said plurality of types of items; and

   ranking, utilizing said intelligent software agent, said located plurality of available items utilizing said utility specified for each of said plurality of types of items.

20   3. The method according to claim 2, further comprising the step of providing said intelligent software agent executing within a client computer system, said client computer system being coupled to a server computer utilizing a computer network.

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4.   The method according to claim 3, further comprising the step of coupling said client computer system to said server computer system utilizing an Internet computer network.

5.   The method according to claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

        coupling a server computer system to a plurality of client computer systems;

        providing an intelligent software agent executing within one of said plurality of client computer systems; and

        searching, utilizing said intelligent agent, said plurality of client computer systems for said plurality of available items which match one of said plurality of types of items.

6.   The method according to claim 1, wherein the step of ranking further comprises the step of comparing a price for each of said plurality of available items to a utility for one of said plurality of types of items which matches said each of said plurality of available items.

7.   The method according to claim 6, wherein the step of comparing further comprises the step of determining a difference between said price for each of said plurality of available items and said utility for one of said plurality of types of items which matches said each of said plurality of available items.

8.   The method according to claim 6, wherein the step of comparing further comprises the step of determining a ratio of said price for each of said plurality of available items to said utility for one of said plurality of types of items which matches said each of said plurality of available items.

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9.   The method according to claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

setting a utility threshold; and

locating a second plurality of available items which match one of said plurality of types of items and which exceed said utility threshold.

5   10.   The method according to claim 9, further comprising the step of selecting one of said second plurality of available items having a lowest price.

11.   The method according to claim 1, further comprising the step of displaying said located plurality of available items.

12.   The method according to claim 1, further comprising the step of selecting one of 10   said located plurality of available items.

13.   The method according to claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

selecting, utilizing an intelligent agent, one of said located plurality of available items; and

completing a purchase transaction, utilizing said intelligent agent, to purchase said 15   selected one of said located plurality of items.

14.   The method according to claim 13, further comprising the step of determining a ratio of a price for each of said plurality of available items to said utility for one of said plurality of types of items which matches said each of said plurality of available items.

15.   The method according to claim 14, further comprising the step of selecting one of 20   said located plurality of available items which provides a highest ratio.

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16. The method according to claim 1, further comprising the step of receiving said plurality of types of items specified by a user.

17. The method according to claim 1, further comprising the step of receiving said plurality of types of items specified by executing a table lookup.

5 18. The method according to claim 1, further comprising the step of receiving said utility for each of said plurality of types of items specified by a user.

19. The method according to claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

receiving a plurality of attributes for each of said specified plurality of types of items;

10 receiving a weighting value specified for each of said plurality of attributes; and

determining an overall utility for each of said plurality of types of items utilizing said weighting value specified for each of said plurality of attributes.

20. A computer program product in a computer system, comprising:

instruction means for receiving a general requirement;

15 instruction means for receiving a specified utility for at least one of a plurality of types of items which would satisfy said requirement;

instruction means for locating a plurality of available items which match at least one of said plurality of types of items; and

instruction means for ranking said located plurality of available items utilizing

20 said utility specified for at least one of said plurality of types of items.

21.   The product according to claim 20, further comprising:

instruction means for providing an intelligent software agent;

instruction means for receiving, utilizing said intelligent software agent, a general requirement;

5   instruction means for receiving, utilizing said intelligent software agent, a specified utility for each of a plurality of types of items which would satisfy said requirement;

instruction means for locating, utilizing said intelligent software agent, a plurality of available items which match one of said plurality of types of items; and

10   instruction means for ranking, utilizing said intelligent software agent, said located plurality of available items utilizing said utility specified for each of said plurality of types of items.

22.   The product according to claim 21, further comprising instruction means for providing said intelligent software agent executing within a client computer system, said

15   client computer system being coupled to a server computer utilizing a computer network.

23.   The product according to claim 22, further comprising instruction means for coupling said client computer system to said server computer system utilizing an Internet computer network.

24.   The product according to claim 20, further comprising:

20   instruction means for coupling a server computer system to a plurality of client computer systems;

instruction means for providing an intelligent software agent executing within one of said plurality of client computer systems; and

instruction means for searching, utilizing said intelligent agent, said plurality of client computer systems for said plurality of available items which match one of said plurality of types of items.

25. The product according to claim 20, wherein said instruction means for ranking further comprises instruction means for comparing a price for each of said plurality of available items to a utility for one of said plurality of types of items which matches said each of said plurality of available items.

26. The product according to claim 25, wherein said instruction means for comparing further comprises instruction means for determining a difference between said price for each of said plurality of available items and said utility for one of said plurality of types of items which matches said each of said plurality of available items.

27. The product according to claim 25, wherein said instruction means for comparing further comprises instruction means for determining a ratio of said price for each of said plurality of available items to said utility for one of said plurality of types of items which matches said each of said plurality of available items.

28. The product according to claim 20, further comprising:

instruction means for setting a utility threshold; and

instruction means for locating a second plurality of available items which match one of said plurality of types of items and which exceed said utility threshold.

29. The product according to claim 28, further comprising instruction means for selecting one of said second plurality of available items having a lowest price.

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30.   The product according to claim 20, further comprising instruction means for displaying said located plurality of available items.

31.   The product according to claim 20, further comprising instruction means for selecting one of said located plurality of available items.

5   32.   The product according to claim 20, further comprising:

instruction means for selecting, utilizing an intelligent agent, one of said located plurality of available items; and

instruction means for completing a purchase transaction, utilizing said intelligent agent, to purchase said selected one of said located plurality of items.

10   33.   The product according to claim 32, further comprising instruction means for determining a ratio of a price for each of said plurality of available items to said utility for one of said plurality of types of items which matches said each of said plurality of available items.

34.   The product according to claim 33, further comprising instruction means for
15   selecting one of said located plurality of available items which provides a highest ratio.

35.   The product according to claim 20, further comprising instruction means for receiving said plurality of types of items specified by a user.

36.   The product according to claim 20, further comprising instruction means for receiving said plurality of types of items specified by executing a table lookup.

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37.   The product according to claim 20, further comprising instruction means for receiving said utility for each of said plurality of types of items specified by a user.

38.   The product according to claim 20, further comprising:

instruction means for receiving a plurality of attributes for each of said specified

5   plurality of types of items;

instruction means for receiving a weighting value specified for each of said plurality of attributes; and

instruction means for determining an overall utility for each of said plurality of types of items utilizing said weighting value specified for each of said plurality of

10   attributes.

39.   A computer system comprising:

said computer system for receiving a general requirement;

said computer system for receiving a specified utility for at least one of a plurality of types of items which would satisfy said requirement;

15   said computer system including a CPU executing code for locating a plurality of available items which match at least one of said plurality of types of items; and

said CPU executing code for ranking said located plurality of available items utilizing said utility specified for at least one of said plurality of types of items.

40.   The system according to claim 39, further comprising:

20   an intelligent software agent;

said intelligent software agent for receiving a general requirement;

said intelligent software agent for a specified utility for each of a plurality of types of items which would satisfy said requirement;

said intelligent software agent for locating a plurality of available items which match one of said plurality of types of items; and

said intelligent software agent for ranking said located plurality of available items utilizing said utility specified for each of said plurality of types of items.

5   41.   The system according to claim 40, further comprising said intelligent software agent executing within a client computer system, said client computer system being coupled to a server computer utilizing a computer network.

42.   The system according to claim 41, further comprising said client computer system being coupled to said server computer system utilizing an Internet computer network.

10   43.   The system according to claim 39, further comprising:

a server computer system coupled to a plurality of client computer systems;

an intelligent software agent executing within one of said plurality of client computer systems; and

said intelligent agent for searching said plurality of client computer systems for

15   said plurality of available items which match one of said plurality of types of items.

44.   The system according to claim 39, further comprising said CPU executing code for comparing a price for each of said plurality of available items to a utility for one of said plurality of types of items which matches said each of said plurality of available items.

20   45.   The system according to claim 44, further comprising said CPU executing code for determining a difference between said price for each of said plurality of available

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items and said utility for one of said plurality of types of items which matches said each of said plurality of available items.

46.   The system according to claim 44, further comprising said CPU executing code for determining a ratio of said price for each of said plurality of available items to said

5   utility for one of said plurality of types of items which matches said each of said plurality of available items.

47.   The system according to claim 39, further comprising:

a utility threshold; and

said CPU executing code for locating a second plurality of available items which

10   match one of said plurality of types of items and which exceed said utility threshold.

48.   The system according to claim 47, further comprising said CPU executing code for selecting one of said second plurality of available items having a lowest price.

49.   The system according to claim 39, further comprising said CPU executing code for displaying said located plurality of available items.

15   50.   The system according to claim 39, further comprising said CPU executing code for selecting one of said located plurality of available items.

51.   The system according to claim 39, further comprising:

an intelligent agent for selecting one of said located plurality of available items; and

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said intelligent agent for completing a purchase transaction to purchase said selected one of said located plurality of items.

52.   The system according to claim 51, further comprising said CPU executing code for determining a ratio of a price for each of said plurality of available items to said utility for one of said plurality of types of items which matches said each of said plurality of available items.

53.   The system according to claim 52, further comprising said CPU executing code for selecting one of said located plurality of available items which provides a highest ratio.

54.   The system according to claim 39, further comprising said CPU executing code for receiving said plurality of types of items specified by a user.

55.   The system according to claim 39, further comprising said CPU executing code for receiving said plurality of types of items specified by executing a table lookup.

56.   The system according to claim 39, further comprising said CPU executing code for receiving said utility for each of said plurality of types of items specified by a user.

57.   The system according to claim 39, further comprising:

said CPU executing code for receiving a plurality of attributes for each of said specified plurality of types of items;

said CPU executing code for receiving a weighting value specified for each of said plurality of attributes; and

said CPU executing code for determining an overall utility for each of said plurality of types of items utilizing said weighting value specified for each of said plurality of attributes.